

Department of Early Childhood Education
2018 Newsletter

PEDAGOGICAL SENSITIVITY AND STRESS REGULATION

My research interests focus on children's stress regulation, well-being, and learning, as well as professionals' occupational well-being in kindergarten settings. One of my ongoing research projects in Finland is about physical activity, nutrition, and stress regulation among kindergarten children. Another project aims to detect optimal learning moments and analyse students' learning motivation. As my educational background is in special education, inclusive education and early intervention are the leading principles in my work.

In a current research project, I seek to investigate the crossover of stress among teachers and children in kindergarten classrooms. It is highly important to understand the multifaceted nature of stress: It can be a wheel of learning when regulated, but in chronic states, stress can jeopardize the development of children as well as the well-being of teachers. Furthermore, as young children are not able to regulate their stress by themselves, sensitive and supportive teachers are needed for co-regulation. Teachers can increase children's adaptation and stress resilience by helping them regulate their inner states. This requires pedagogical sensitivity that takes shape through not only meaningful interaction between teachers and children, but also shared moments between children and other early childhood professionals in the team. In practice, pedagogical sensitivity means:

- Adults recognize children's initiatives and respond to them quickly
- Adults are tuned into interaction with children by expressing compassion and appreciation
- Adults use warm and positive tones, facial expressions and gestures that signal safety and comfort for children
- Adults recognize children's individual differences: Some children need more support and scaffolding than others
- Adults understand the importance of being connected with others: They acknowledge withdrawn children as well as those who act out, and guarantee group participation for all children.



Dr. Nislin Mari Anneli

Teacher's pedagogical sensitivity can protect children from extreme stress and help them learn adaptive coping strategies. Life without stress is not the objective or even desirable. If regulated, the boosting effect of stress is important for us all.

Reference

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- Sajaniemi, N. (2017). The Stressed Child. In A. Owen (ed.). *Childhood Today* (p. 128-146). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

ENHANCING FAMILY WELL-BEING: THE ROLE OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Rebecca Y. M. Cheung



Child adjustment is linked to parental well-being. Despite years of effort made to document the association, this line of research has almost reached a point of diminishing returns. In recent years, a new wave of longitudinal studies have emerged to investigate why and how parental well-being is influential to child development. In a series of studies, my collaborators and I discovered that parental depression worsens family processes, including couple communication, which undermine children's later adjustment (e.g., Cummings, Cheung, Koss, & Davies, 2014). Our recent work also suggested that both mothers and fathers play vital roles in children's functioning (Cheung, Cummings, Zhang, & Davies, 2016). When parents engage in constructive behaviors to manage couple conflict (e.g., **calm discussion, reflective listening, showing of affection, problem-solving**), other family members respond with more constructiveness. Likewise, when either parent engage in **destructive conflict behaviors** (e.g., verbal aggression, physical aggression, stonewalling), others reciprocate with hostility. This is not to say that children are passive recipients of family dynamics, for their dysregulated behaviors also worsen interparental communications, thereby generating a vicious cycle of family-wide negativity.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF FAMILY-WIDE NEGATIVITY

Breaking the vicious cycle requires the efforts of all family members. Importantly, parental well-being is crucial to family dynamics and child adjustment. In the face of parental depression, the well-being of a second parent is all the more crucial, as it serves as a resource to safeguard child adjustment (Hossain, Field, Gonzalez, & Malphurs, 1994). To mitigate family discord, family members must acquire constructive communication and emotion regulation skills, and refrain from using destructive conflict tactics. Our ultimate goals are to enhance family members' well-being and improve the lives of discordant families. Here are some practical communication strategies:



When an argument is about to start, family members can:

- **Make an agreement to regulate their anger** through deep breathing and say, "let's calm down first and come back to this an hour later."
- **Engage in reflective listening** by trying to understand the other person's perspective. For example, one can say, "can you tell me more about your concerns?"; "you must be upset because....." or "I hear your frustration. You feel unappreciated, especially as you have done....."
- **Demonstrate affection** by touching the other person's shoulder or saying, "I want you to be happy."
- **Refrain from using destructive conflict tactics**, such as personal insult, pursue, threat, and physical aggression.
- **Resolve the problem** by detailing strategies. For example, one can say, "let's take a few days to think about a concrete plan"; "shall we discuss this after lunch on Saturday?" or "let's resolve this by doing..."



Reference

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Cummings, E. M., Cheung, R. Y. M., Koss, K. J., & Davies, P. (2014). Parental depressive symptoms and adolescent adjustment: A prospective test of an explanatory model for the role of marital conflict. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 42, 1153-1166.

Field, T. M., Hossain, Z., & Malphurs, J. (1999). "Depressed" fathers' interactions with their infants. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 20, 322-332.

Dr. Cheung Yuen Man, Rebecca



INTERVIEW WITH Ms. JESSIE PUI CHING LAM

Ms. Jessie Lam is a Lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education. She has extensive teaching experience in the field of early childhood education and she specializes in teacher professional development.

1. How do you FEEL about TEACHING THE HIGHER DIPLOMA IN Early Childhood Education (ECE) PROGRAMME?

I feel excited! I'm also honoured to be assigned to teach the first class for the Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme with English as the teaching medium. I believe that my experience in the United States as a front-line kindergarten teacher and an Assistant Director of a preschool would help enrich the current curriculum.



2. What do you EXPECT STUDENTS TO MASTER FROM THE PROGRAMME?

I hope my students will know more about the new global education trends and different teaching strategies. I also hope that students will become full-fledged, knowledgeable, and competent kindergarten teachers by the time they graduate. By then, they will be fully-equipped with sets of skills to work within multicultural and multidisciplinary atmosphere, and will be ready to tackle the problems that they face.

3. How did you HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP THE SKILLS THAT YOU MENTIONED EARLIER?

I always encourage students to participate in various learning activities such as poster presentation and in-depth discussion throughout the semester. By doing so, they have opportunities to learn different pedagogies used in the field of ECE and develop their global perspectives. From my point of view, other than studying abroad, one way for students to learn the lessons of globalization is to engage them in classroom, co-curricular, and other educational activities that heighten their awareness of internationalization.

In the past semesters, I am glad to see that students demonstrated their abilities in different aspects including leading and functioning effectively in a team. They possess international perspectives and show flexibility to adapt to continuous changes in the field of ECE. Most importantly, the content of the programme enables students to recognize education as relevant to their lives, so that they have the curiosity and desire to learn about the profession. I was thrilled to know that EduHK is offering classes in English for the Higher Diploma in ECE programme. I am sure students who are from different cultural or language backgrounds or those who aspire to work in the international school setting in Hong Kong will also be well-equipped with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to perform effectively in the kindergarten classroom and wider community.

Ms. Lam Pui Ching Jessie



HIGHER DIPLOMA IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMME:

OUR NEW STREAM WITH ENGLISH AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

In September 2017, we successfully launched our new EMI stream for Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education. The EMI Co-ordinator for Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education, Ms. Angela Chung, highlights that the programme aims to provide students with academic and professional preparations necessary to become competent, communicative, and caring teachers. To this end, we have organized a series of fun workshops including a drama workshop, with the goal of increasing students' confidence in adopting various teaching and communication skills through drama and role play.



Students performed happily in the ECE English Drama workshop.

In December 2017, we invited a drama expert who was trained in the United Kingdom in drama performance to hold a fun and engaging workshop through the power of role play and games. Students found it particularly engaging and useful. We also held several other workshops about free play. One of them was "Playful Strategies in Teaching", which was demonstrated by two international school teachers and a representative from a non-governmental organization in Hong Kong. These workshops were enlightening and useful, as the speakers demonstrated practical teaching skills in the classroom. The audience also had a chance to gain hands-on experience, in other words, play! Overall, the audience had a wonderful time at our inspiring workshops. We are excited about organizing more workshops in the years to come.



Students used some loose cards and materials to create a free play environment.



CONFERENCE ON NEW DIRECTIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULUM 2018

The Department of Early Childhood Education will host a whole-day conference on May 19, 2018 on our Tai Po main campus (10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories). The theme of this year's conference is New Directions in Early Childhood Education Curriculum. We welcome a wide range of audience including school principals, teachers, teacher educators, academics, and government officials. The keynote speaker, Professor Marilyn Fleer from Monash University, Australia and our two distinguished speakers, Professor Kevin Chung and Professor Kerry Lee from the Department of Early Childhood Education, EduHK, will be speaking on the above theme.

Along with our keynote lectures, there will also be a poster session, parallel seminars, workshops and chatrooms. It will be a great opportunity for kindergarten teachers, professional workers, schools, and researchers to mingle with each other, share their curricula, their achievements, and to exchange their experience in teaching and learning.

If you have any questions about the conference, please feel free to contact Ms. Gigi Cheng (gkcccheng@eduhk.hk). We look forward to seeing you at the conference!

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